

To: Electoral Area Services Committee
From: Peyton Bradley, Emergency Management Assistant

Date: 2023-03-09
File No: 7130-01

Subject: Evacuee Support Services (ESS) Program Guide

INTENT

This report is intended to advise the Electoral Area Directors that the Emergency Support Services (ESS) Program Guide has been updated by Emergency Management and Climate Readiness British Columbia (EMCR). Some communities are providing feedback through their Boards and Councils to the new Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR). Staff is not looking for a recommendation and has forwarded this report for information and awareness.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is **to inform the Regional District's Board members of the updates to the ESS Program Guide**, highlight actions taken by FVRD staff, and share a letter that Regional District of Bulkley-Nachako (RDBN) has sent to the Province and UBCM.

Evacuee Emergency Support Services (ESS) is a provincial emergency response program designed to meet the basic needs of British Columbians impacted by disasters by providing short-term support in a compassionate manner. ESS is designed to provide support for disasters ranging from single-house fires to provincial-level events involving large evacuations. These supports enable people to re-establish themselves as quickly as possible after an emergency or disaster. The ESS program was designed to be implemented by Local Authorities and First Nations.

The ESS Program Guide is a newly released document by EMCRC. The Program Guide now includes specific operational instructions, expected best practices, minimum standards, and responsibilities of local governments in implementing the program. It was released to replace the former ESS Field Guide (released in 2010), which provided information regarding the provincial structure in place to support the provision of ESS by local volunteers and staff.

The ESS Program Guide presented with this report details new specifics of the Emergency Support Services program, as envisioned by Provincial Government staff. It sets forth a new standard of ESS delivery.

DISCUSSION

The ESS program was designed by the Province more than 30 years ago. At the time, it was designed to be wholly implemented by volunteers under the general direction of a local authority. Over the years, the Province has changed and evolved its expectations, thereby creating a slow-snowball effect of assigning new responsibilities without the engagement, consultation, or resources local government would expect based on the language in the Community Charter and Local Government Act.

The ESS program was updated by the Province, and a new ESS Program guide was released in December 2022. The update was performed over a series of years. Consultation opportunities were provided to key non-profit agencies. Equal opportunity was not provided to Local Authorities like FVRD.

The new Program Guide changes the foundational and operational elements of the existing program and ties it to a provincial policy. Local Government staff province-wide have observed challenges with this guide, including the lack of consultation in the development of the new program. There are many inconsistencies throughout the guide, and the guide makes assumptions about local government, structures, roles and responsibilities that are not accurate for many organizations, especially smaller and rural local governments. This results in the guide setting out expectations that are not consistent with the way FVRD delivers ESS and the resources available for it.

FVRD staff suggest **that the Province's ESS program needs a comprehensive overhaul to meet the needs of modern disasters and also to address the realities of service provision in rural areas.** To do this effectively, engagement with local authorities – who provide the services on the ground - is needed.

Opportunity for feedback was not provided in advance of the release of the Program Guide. This is a key issue because Local Authorities are expected to implement it and other provincial programs. The changes put forth in the new Program Guide impact local government costs and service delivery. Accordingly, consultation with local governments on changes to the ESS program is necessary to assess impacts on local governments and to ensure the changes are workable.

The extent of some key challenges with the new guide is outlined in the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) Committee of the Whole report, which is attached for reference. FVRD Emergency Management staff **agree with the majority of comments and concerns set out in RDBN's report.**

Staff shared the guide with the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Flood Wildlife Advisory Committee (FWAC) on December 8th, 2022. Since the writing of the report UBCM has discontinued the Flood Wildfire Advisory Committee. Staff will need to consider other opportunities to submit feedback to the Province on ESS program modernization.

COST

This report does not have any costs associated with the update of the Emergency Support Services Program Guide, however, should FVRD be faced with implementing the program in the manner presented in the guide, the budgetary allocation for ESS may be insufficient and require further Board reporting on cost expectations.

FVRD does apply for annual competitive UBCM Community Emergency Preparedness Fund grants to support the annual work plan projects and ESS service delivery. However, these grants are generally limited to equipment and supplies. They would not offset additional costs associated with delivering ESS services in accordance with the new guide.

CONCLUSION

Should the Board choose to similarly address the new Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, direction may be provided to staff requesting a more fulsome analysis of the new program guide and/or draft letter.

COMMENTS BY:

Tarina Colledge, Manager of Emergency Management:	reviewed and supported
Graham Daneluz, Director of Planning & Development:	reviewed and supported
Kelly Lownsbrough, Director of Corporate Services / CFO:	Reviewed and supported.
Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer:	Reviewed and supported.